

Two House Groups Eye Sale of Snooper Devices

By Norton Mintz

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Two congressional subcommittees are conducting inquiries into violations of privacy by the unrestricted sale of electronic snooping devices to any beeping Tom, Dick or Harry who wants to buy one.

But Sen. Edward V. Long (D-Mo.) and Rep. Cornelius E. Gallagher (D-N.J.), chairmen of the subcommittees, are concerned also about the proliferation of surveillance by official agencies.

Long heads the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Administrative Practices and Procedure. It has an informal working relationship with Gallagher's Special House Government Operations subcommittee. Each plans hearings that may begin within a few weeks.

In a recent interview with United Press International, Gallagher said he has concluded after a preliminary investigation that the United States has become a nation of snoopers. Long expressed fear to UPI that without strong laws to curb official and private snooping personal privacy will become more mythical than real.

Investigators for the subcommittees have come up with items like these:

Exposé and men's magazines have been carrying advertisements for a \$1 set of instructions with which Beeping Toms, using "ordinary store materials," can build in 15 minutes a "superdirectional mike that amplifies sound 1000 times."

"Hear whispered secret conversation through solid walls," the advertisement says. "Yes, you can actually hear conversations through walls a block away." This language appears with a cartoon in which a man on one side of a wall has a small eavesdropping gadget to his ear. On the other side of the wall is a young couple sitting on a couch.

An advertisement in last month's Diners' Club magazine offers the "Internal Audio Wall Probe." It's \$39.95, and Club members can charge it.

When "this amazing little 6-ounce device" is placed against a wall with a suction cup, the copy says, one can detect through an earplug "the faintest of voices and

sounds in the next room." This is claimed to be "good for knowing what the kids are doing without their realizing it."

For \$6.95 more one can order an accessory that permits a tape recorder to record the voices and sounds.

For \$18.95 newspaper readers are offered a parabolic microphone called "The Snooper." The advertisement invites the buyer to "aim it at a group of friends a block away and pick up every word. Just think of the ways you can use this."

Other advertisements offer vest-pocket recorders with tie-clasp microphones for \$37.50.

In some new apartment building in New York City elevators are equipped with concealed closed-circuit television cameras. The purpose is to guard against muggers and vandals, but innocent persons also can be observed without their knowledge.

The possibilities of long-range eavesdropping with a laser beam were cited by Long. Even now, the Senator said, a beam aimed at a window can be made to pick up conversations and transmit them hundreds of feet to an amplifying device.

Gallagher's subcommittee is looking into complaints by the National Capital Area Civil Liberties Union that Department of Sanitation collectors here "segregated" the refuse of certain aliens, Black Muslims and a prominent lawyer and his wife who had appeared before the House Un-American Activities Committee. The District Government has said it stopped segregating the couple's trash but declined to say why it started the practice.

In connection with the House subcommittee inquiry, the General Services Administration has asked manufacturers of electronic surveillance equipment to disclose how much they have sold to Government agencies.

Long regards the agencies as "among the worst offenders." He is open-minded about reforms that would permit essential criminal detection work while guaranteeing the privacy of innocent third parties.